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Recent Developments

On December 28, 2025, Myanmar's military junta began a phased election due to complete by January 25, 2026. Prior to the elections a spokesperson announced the end of a state of emergency declared after a coup in 2021, which deposed the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi and has been followed by civil war. Opposition groups pledged to boycott the elections, and election monitors warned the polls will be used to consolidate the military's hold on power under leader Min Aung Hlaing, who is subject to an arrest warrant request by the ICC prosecutor. The election relies on voter lists compiled during a controversial nationwide census in October 2024 conducted in townships under the military's territorial control.

In the countdown to the election, the military passed the Law to Protect Multi-Party Democratic General Elections from Disruption and Sabotage (2025), which was subsequently used to arrest critics of the election.

ICNL continues to monitor new regulatory developments affecting civic space in Myanmar. For more on Myanmar and past reports, please check out our [Myanmar page](#) and/or contact asia@icnl.org.

Introduction

Civil society has long played a vital role in supporting communities, advancing social development, and advocating for human rights and democratic governance in Myanmar.

However, the legal environment for civil society has fluctuated dramatically over time. Under the quasi-civilian government (2011–2021), there was a relative opening of civic space. Yet even during this transition, restrictive laws—such as the Penal Code and the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law—continued to hinder the full exercise of civic freedoms. Since the military coup in February 2021, the legal framework has become increasingly restrictive. The junta's imposition of the Organization Registration Law (2022) and amendments to the Penal Code and other laws have introduced broad and vague provisions that severely constrain civil society's ability to operate independently and access resources.

As a result, civic freedoms in Myanmar are now under intense pressure. Freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly are tightly restricted. The junta has imposed sweeping restrictions on protests, censored independent media, and criminalized dissent, while the use of surveillance and punitive legislation has created an atmosphere of fear for activists, journalists, and ordinary people. CSOs face harassment, arbitrary inspections, and accusations of terrorism for supporting pro-democracy movements. These conditions leave little room for civil society to contribute meaningfully to public life.

Civic Freedoms at a Glance

Organizational Forms	Organizations
Registration Body	Union Registration Board, Region or State Registration Board, Union Territorial Registration Board, Self-Administered Division or Zone Registration Board or Township Registration Board (depending on the geographic scope of operations)
Barriers to Formation	The enactment of the new Organization Registration Law (ORL) in October 2022 departed from previous voluntary registration and imposed a mandatory, complex, and expensive registration process for both domestic and international NGOs. The ORL implementation rules are not available to the public. The 2023 Political Party Registration Law prevents anyone convicted of a crime from joining a political party. Most trade unions have been banned.
Barriers to Operations	The government imposes heavy constraints over activities that are limited to “social tasks” and prohibits any activities “directly or indirectly related to the political, economic and religious sectors.” (2(g), ORL, 2022)
Barriers to Resources	Organizations are subject to a strict financial monitoring framework over non-governmental organizations.
Barriers to Expression	Several laws have been used to impede the freedom of expression, including the Penal Code, Official Secrets Act, the 2004 Electronic Transactions Act, and the 2013 Telecommunications Law, and the 2025 Law to Protect Multi-Party Democratic General Elections from Disruption and Sabotage.
Barriers to Assembly	In 2021, gatherings of more than 5 people were prohibited, and a curfew was put in place. Since then, violent crackdowns on protesters have been reported, as well as arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances that continue to impede the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Legal Overview

This section provides a brief overview of Myanmar's legal framework for the promotion and protection of civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	No
Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)	No
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	2017
Optional Protocol to ICESCR (Op-ICESCR)	No
Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention (ILO No. 87)	1955

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	No
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	1997
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women	No
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1991
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW)	No
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2011
Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide	1956

Key Regional Agreements	Ratification
ASEAN Charter	2008

* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The current Constitution of Myanmar was published in 2008 following a referendum and entered into effect in 2011. Paragraph 354 of the 2008 [Constitution](#) states:

Every citizen shall be at liberty in the exercise of the following rights, if not contrary to the laws, enacted for Union security, prevalence of law and order, community peace and tranquility or public order and morality:

1. to express and publish freely their convictions and opinions;
2. to assemble peacefully without arms and holding procession;
3. to form associations and organizations;
4. to develop their language, literature, culture they cherish, religion they profess, and customs without prejudice to the relations between one national race and another or among national races and to other faiths.

In December 2013, the Government invited public comments on the Constitution. CSOs, political parties, and other interest groups submitted comments for consideration, focusing especially on Article 6(f) (political leadership of the role of the defense services); Article 59(f) (presidential qualifications); and Article 436 (more than 75% majority needed for amendment of the Constitution). A civil society-formed network called 'People's Network for Constitutional Reform' mobilized public debate on the Constitution, and leading opposition party NLD (National League for Democracy) launched a nationwide campaign on

constitutional reform. No significant amendments were made.

In January 2019, a [Joint Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional Amendment \(JPCCA\)](#) was established to suggest constitutional amendments, with representation of all parties in the Union Parliament, including the military forces. The COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 general elections, and later the 2021 coup d'état interrupted the process, and none of the more than 3,000 suggested amendments were considered.

Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing relied on Article 417 of the 2008 Constitution to first declare a state of emergency and seize power in February 2021 with a coup denouncing alleged fraud from the NLD at the 2020 general elections. Various organizations have denounced the illegality of the coup, countering the SAC's claims (see [IDEA](#), 2022). The state of emergency was extended multiple times, and the State Administration Council announced that elections initially planned for August 2023 would only be held after the country was at peace and stable. Elections began on December 28, 2025 in constituencies controlled by the military and will end on January 31, 2026. The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), formed of lawmakers elected in the 2020 general elections that were prevented from taking their seats due to the coup, declared the 2008 Constitution abolished in March 2021. Instead, they released a new interim Charter that laid the ground for the National Unity Government (NUG), that was officially established mid-April 2021. The NUG has called the military's elections a "sham."

NATIONAL LAWS, POLICIES, AND REGULATIONS

Relevant national legislation includes the following:

- Association Registration Law (2014)
- Organization Registration Law (2022) (repealed the Association Registration Law)
- [Unlawful Associations Act](#) (India Act XIV,1908)
- [The Code of Civil Procedure](#) (1979)
- Law to Protect Multi-Party Democratic General Elections from Disruption and Sabotage (2025)
- [The Electronic Transactions Law](#) (2004)
- [Burma Official Secrets Act](#) (1923)
- [The Law Amending Income Tax Law](#) (2011)
- [Section 5 of the Emergency Provision Act](#) (1950)
- [The Labour Organization Law](#) (2011)
- [Social Security Law](#) (2012)
- [Regulations relating to the Right to Peaceful Assembly and Procession](#)(2012)
- [Law Amending the Code of Civil Procedure](#) (2008)
- Guidelines for UN agencies, International Organizations and NGO/INGOs on Cooperation Programme in Myanmar ([1st version \(2006\)](#); 2nd version (2011))
- Telecommunications Law (2013)

- National Records and Archives Law (2019)
- Association Registration Rule (5 June 2015)
- Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law (4 October 2016)
- Media Law (14 March 2014)
- Media Rule (17 June 2015)
- [Printing and Publishing Law](#) (14 March 2014)
- Contempt of Courts Law (29 July 2013)
- Broadcasting Law
- Law Protecting the Privacy and Security of Citizens (8 March 2017)
- Counter-Terrorism Law (4 June 2014)
- Counter-Terrorism Rule (2015)
- [Political Parties Registration Law](#) (2023)
- [Cyber Security Law](#) (2025)

PENDING REGULATORY INITIATIVES

We are unaware of any pending NGO legislative / regulatory initiatives at this time. If you are aware of pending initiatives, write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

Legal Analysis

This section provides an in-depth assessment of Myanmar's legal environment for civic freedoms, including the barriers to the exercise of the freedoms of association (formation, operations, resources), expression, and peaceful assembly. Please note that the implementing rules for the Organization Registration Law are not available to the public. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

The Organization Registration Law (ORL) applies to two broad categories of not-for-profit organizations: internal (or domestic) organizations and international organizations.

An internal organization is defined as “a non-governmental organization which was registered under this law, formed with five or more citizens in order to carry out social tasks without taking any benefit in accord with the entitlements mentioned in the Constitution for the sake of the State and the citizens” (Section 2(c)).

An international organization is defined as an organization formed under the laws of a foreign country with branches in Myanmar that are aimed at carrying out “any social task without taking any benefit in the country.” At least 40 percent of the members of the executive committee of an international organization must be Myanmar citizens. In comparison to the 2014 Association Registration Law, this law limits an organization’s activities to “social tasks,” thereby prohibiting anything considered to be political

activities.

PUBLIC BENEFIT STATUS

Once registered, an internal organization can apply for an income tax exemption with the Ministry of Finance and Revenue. The law does not, however, recognize “public benefit” or “charitable” status.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Prior to 2020, various governmental initiatives and plans in Myanmar, such as the government’s 12-point economic agenda and the *Framework for Economic and Social Reform*, aimed at enhancing civic participation. However, these initiatives were largely limited to initial announcements, and their progress was disrupted first by the COVID-19 pandemic and later by the military coup in 2021.

Key laws and regulations supporting public participation included:

- The 2013 State and Region Hluttaw Law, which allowed citizens to submit questions directly to members of parliament (MPs) and attend parliamentary sessions.
- The 2012 Ward or Village Tract Administration Law, which introduced a “people-centered development approach” through the establishment of committees at the township level that were tasked with collecting and responding to public concerns.

Before the coup, Myanmar’s decentralization process had begun to delegate greater responsibilities to subnational levels of governance, including through the 2012 Ward or Village Tract Administration Law. In addition, budget development and resource allocation mechanisms at the subnational level had shown some promise in encouraging and enabling public participation.

Myanmar had also joined several international initiatives aimed at fostering transparency and participatory governance, including:

- Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)
- Open Budget Index (OBI)
- Open Government Partnership (OGP)
- Open Budget Survey (OBS)

Despite these measures, most subnational governance actors exercised limited autonomy, and decision-making remained highly centralized and top-down.

Public participation was also undermined throughout the election processes. The Union Election Commission cancelled voting in some conflict-affected areas ahead of the 2020 general elections, effectively disenfranchising millions of people and preventing them from electing their representatives. The democratic character of the elections was further undermined by opposition candidates’ limited access to state-run media and restrictions on in-person campaigning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The military coup d’état in February 2021 was the ultimate denial not only of the election results, but also of the public’s right to participate in the conduct of public affairs. The coup marked a sharp turn towards repression. A state of emergency declared in February 2021 preceded a large increase in widespread surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and detention. Intimidation and violence against the general population became widespread, rendering public participation effectively impossible and life-threatening. Dissent was further criminalized through amendments to the Penal Code and the Counter-Terrorism Law. VPNs were blocked in May 2024 and made subject to licensing from 2025, ensuring further surveillance of the

population.

Public Awareness

Efforts to raise awareness about these participation and consultation mechanisms have largely been driven by CSOs, including both domestic and international organizations engaged in human rights education. For example, the Open Hluttaw Platform, which was designed to monitor the performance of elected representatives, was a promising initiative but parliament was shuttered by the 2021 military coup. All participatory mechanisms have since stopped and the military has re-established its past propaganda apparatus.

Marginalized Groups and Intimidation of Activists

Ethnic minorities and political opponents have long been targeted by successive military regimes, intensifying efforts since the coup to suppress their public participation. The military regime has imposed widespread restrictions on civic engagement, including curbs on communication tools and internet blackouts, partially to prevent marginalized groups—especially ethnic minorities—from participating in public affairs.

The 1982 Citizenship Law rendered many minorities, including the vast majority of the Rohingya minority, stateless, severely limiting their civic freedoms and excluding them from political and social participation. Successive governments and military regimes have advanced a Buddhist nationalist agenda at the expense of ethnic and religious minorities in the country. Most official communications are available only in Burmese, and the limited materials translated into ethnic languages are typically instrumental. Following the coup, the military junta reimposed travel restrictions, including checkpoints, travel authorizations, and curfews, which have severely limited access to many ethnic areas.

Women lack explicit legal protections against violence and discrimination, further constraining their ability to participate fully in civic and political life. While LGBTI+ individuals experienced some tolerance in urban areas from 2011 to 2021, same-sex relations remain criminalized and the LGBTI community continues to face harassment.

BARRIERS TO FORMATION

In 2022, the military regime enacted the Organizational Registration Law (ORL) to replace the 2014 Association Registration Law (ARL), which had created a relatively enabling regulatory regime for CSOs, including voluntary registration.

The new law retains the decentralized registration structure of the 2014 ARL, with registration bodies operating at various levels, including the Union Registration Board, Region or State Registration Board, Union Territorial Registration Board, Self-Administered Division or Zone Registration Board, and Township Registration Board (Section 2(e)).

However, the ORL introduces significant changes:

- It establishes a mandatory registration system, whereas the 2014 ARL allowed for voluntary registration. Under the 2022 ORL, both domestic and international non-profit organizations “shall...apply for registration” (Sections 7 and 17). It also introduces criminal penalties for failing to register.
- Permissible CSO activities are now limited to “social tasks” (Section 2(c)); political, economic, and religious issues are explicitly excluded (Section 2(g)).
- The registration process has become more complex and expensive, with added bureaucratic layers and security checks at multiple administrative levels.

- Registration can be suspended or terminated based on vague accusations of “harming the State’s sovereign power, the prevalence of law and order, security and national unity” (Section 25), without due process protections or the right to appeal.
- The law imposes strict financial monitoring of foreign funding and CSO financial flows (Section 28(g)).
- Organizations must renew their registration every five years.

Registration fees also increased significantly under the ORL:

- National-level fees tripled, from MMK 100,000 to MMK 300,000 (approx USD 50 to USD 150 as of October 2025).
- Regional-level fees increased from MMK 30,000 to MMK 100,000 (approx USD 15 to USD 50 as of October 2025).
- International organizations must now pay MMK 500,000 (approx USD 75 as of October 2025).
- Applicants at divisional and township levels face new fees (between MMK 30,000 and MMK 50,000 (approx USD 15 and USD 25 as of October 2025)), where no fees previously applied.

Although some safeguards remain—such as requiring written explanations for registration denials (Section 10)—the process remains onerous. Barriers to registration include:

- the deterrent effect of navigating complex requirements;
- inconsistencies in implementation across the numerous registration committees;
- a narrow window for appeal, as organizations have only 30 days to resubmit applications after rejection, after which denials become final (Sections 11 and 16); and
- burdensome renewal procedures, requiring applications for extension at least 90 days in advance (Section 14), with registration certificates valid for only five years (Section 47).

The implementing rules for the Organizational Registration Law are not available to the public.

In addition, the State Administration Council (SAC) issued a new Political Parties Registration Law on January 26, 2023. This law required all previously registered political parties—more than 90—to re-register within 60 days, resulting in the dissolution of many, including the National League for Democracy (NLD). To contest general elections, parties must now demonstrate membership of at least 100,000 and pay a MMK 100 million deposit (1,000 members and MMK 10 million for state or regional elections) and field candidates in at least half of all constituencies, a threshold that severely disadvantages smaller ethnic parties.

The law also prevents individuals and organizations that have been declared as unlawful or terrorist from joining or registering political parties (Section 4(f)). Pro-democracy organizations such as the National Unity Government (NUG) and the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) have already been labeled terrorist organizations by the SAC, effectively barring them from participation. This new law will likely prevent most ethnic political groups and opposition parties from challenging the military’s proxy-party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), in future elections.

In January 2025, the SAC adopted a Cyber Security Law. The law’s broad scope potentially covers

associations providing digital security services, including CSOs that train individuals to protect their devices and data. It requires vendors of security services to obtain a license from an as-yet unnamed regulatory ministry and imposes sanctions, including prison terms, for operating without a license.

BARRIERS TO OPERATIONS

Between 2008 and February 2021, CSOs operated with comparatively less harassment from government authorities. The enactment of the Organization Registration Law (ORL) in October 2022 marked a shift toward a highly restrictive regulatory framework, reflecting the military and State Administration Council's (SAC's) broader crackdown on civil society following the 2021 coup.

A major barrier to civil society operations is the restriction of permissible activities under the ORL to “social tasks” and the explicit prohibition of any activities “directly or indirectly related to the political, economic and religious sectors” (Section 2(g)). This not only severely constrains civil society’s ability to operate freely and contribute to public affairs but also appears inconsistent with Myanmar’s obligations under international human rights law, including the rights to freedom of assembly, expression, association, and participation in public life.

In December 2024, the SAC significantly raised the minimum amount that associations must maintain in their bank accounts to register or remain registered from MMK 100,000 (USD 50-100) to between MMK 15 and 100 million (USD 3,400 to 23,000). The same order reportedly requires associations to retain 70 percent of their overall budgets in state-run bank accounts, limiting them to spending only 30 percent on operations.

Further tightening control, on September 26, 2024, the SAC amended the Counter-Terrorism Law, introducing substantial fines for companies and organizations—including banks, CSOs, international NGOs, and telecom providers—that fail to comply with prohibitions or obligations imposed by rules, regulations, terms, notifications, orders, directives, and procedures issued under the law. These fines can be imposed alongside criminal penalties.

The multi-tiered system of registration committees creates territorial constraints, restricting organizations’ ability to operate across administrative boundaries.

Registered CSOs must submit annual narrative reports and financial statements to the relevant registration committee (Section 28(g)); allow inspection of their publications, documents, and premises (Section 28(h)); and obtain approval from the registration board for any organizational or management changes (Section 28(j)). Renewal of the registration certificate every five years is contingent on the submission of the annual report.

Government-established NGOs (GONGOs) are exempt from these obligations (Section 26) and often receive other special privileges, creating unfair competition for community-based organizations.

BARRIERS TO RESOURCES

The collapse of Myanmar’s financial system following the 2021 coup d’etat left domestic and international NGOs in a state of uncertainty. Some international NGOs initially chose to suspend tax payments in protest against the new military regime. In March 2021, the junta seized the Open Society Foundation’s (OSF) accounts in Myanmar, citing its support of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

The Organization Registration Law (ORL) requires organizations “not to cooperate with, assist in and provide support to either directly or indirectly money laundering and terrorism financing through cash flow, cash management and monetary support” (Section 6). In practice, the vague language of this provision creates significant risks for CSOs, as a wide range of groups—including pro-democracy actors such as the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), the National Unity Government (NUG), and the People’s Defense Forces (PDF)— have been arbitrarily designated as “terrorist” organizations. Combined with intrusive financial monitoring, such restrictions undermine CSOs’ ability to secure and manage funding. In October 2022, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) placed Myanmar on its blacklist

for failing to address money laundering and terrorist financing risks. While enhanced due diligence requirements are intended to curb illicit financial activities, they also risk further restricting civil society's access to remittances and foreign aid flows, exacerbating the already shrinking civic space.

BARRIERS TO EXPRESSION

One of the most significant developments during Myanmar's political transition (2008 to 2021) was the expansion of freedom of expression. The abolition of the Censorship Board in 2012 allowed individuals and organizations greater latitude to voice dissent and participate more actively in law and policy making.

However, even during this period of relative openness, new restrictive laws were adopted and old ones remained in place that were frequently used to suppress critical voices. The 2013 Telecommunications Law (Telecom Law) established the regulatory framework for foreign investment into Myanmar's telecommunications infrastructure. However, it also contained provisions that impermissibly restricted freedom of expression. Most notably, Article 66(d), which prohibited the use of a telecommunications network to extort, coerce, defame, disturb, cause undue influence, or threaten anyone, was used extensively to curtail political dissent. Similarly, Article 33 of the 2004 Electronic Transactions Law criminalized using electronic transactions technology for acts deemed "detrimental to the security of the State or prevalence of law and order or community peace and tranquility or national solidarity or national economy or national culture." These articles were used to jail journalists, dissidents, activists, CSO leaders, and others for merely expressing opinions.

In addition, Article 77 of the Telecom Law authorized the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology to order the suspension of telecom services in emergency situations. The absence of clear criteria allowed the government to arbitrarily shut down internet and mobile communications, often immediately preceding crackdowns on peaceful protests or other human rights violations.

Broad language in Section 505 of the Penal Code was similarly abused to silence dissent. The section criminalized making, publishing, or circulating any statement or report that, among other things, is likely to cause public fear or alarm or to incite offenses against the state or against "public tranquility."

Following the February 2021 coup, the junta dramatically escalated repression of freedom of expression. Journalists, activists, and other individuals—especially protesters—have been targeted for supporting the pro-democracy movement. The military reintroduced censorship, used the state-owned broadcast media to disseminate propaganda, and heavily restricted access to information and free media, including social media.

The junta also amended legal frameworks to entrench these restrictions. In March 2023, the Law on Printing and Publishing was amended to authorize the revocation or suspension of licenses for alleged publication of culturally offensive content. Sections 505(a) and 505A of the Penal Code now contain even broader language, facilitating the prosecution of individuals seen as encouraging civil servants to join the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). The Penal Code and Electronic Transactions Act was further amended to criminalize anti-regime statements.

To strengthen digital surveillance, VPNs were blocked, and widespread monitoring of online activity resumed. Thousands of individuals have been arrested, forced into hiding or exile, or harassed for their pro-democracy views as a result of this crackdown.

In February 2021, the junta amended the [Electronic Transactions Act](#) to introduce criminal liability for spreading "misinformation or disinformation with the intent of causing public panic, loss of trust or social division on cyberspace" (Section 38(c)). This provision has been widely used to suppress dissent, including criticism of the coup and the junta's actions. Following her arrest on February 1, 2021, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi was charged under the Electronic Transactions Act for allegedly possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies, among other charges. A foreign journalist was also prosecuted under this law but was later released. In January 2025, the junta adopted the Cyber Security Law, which further criminalizes freedom of expression, including defamation, and tightens state control over digital spaces.

In July 2025, the military regime adopted the Law to Protect Multi-Party Democratic General Elections from Disruption and Sabotage, imposing punishments up to the death penalty for anyone who opposes or disrupts the elections. The law has been used to target a range of critics including artists and online influencers. In late 2025, [at least 94 people](#), including filmmakers, actors, and election candidates were arrested under this law for actions such as “liking” anti-election posts or criticizing campaign videos.

In November 2025, the junta announced in its daily newspaper that it was pardoning 2,361 individuals convicted under Penal Code Article 505A, conditionally remitting the sentences of a further 724 people, and ending the prosecutions of 5,580, all on the basis that they should be free to participate in the upcoming general elections.

BARRIERS TO ASSEMBLY

The 2016 Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law requires organizers to submit a request for authorization to the township level police chief at least 48 hours before holding a protest or assembly. Police routinely arrest organizers and protesters if assemblies proceed without notification. Even when organizers comply with the notice requirement, Section 20 allows authorities to prosecute them for allegedly violating vague or arbitrary conditions attached to protests.

In 2017, a blanket ban on demonstrations was introduced in 11 townships in the Yangon region. This ban was used selectively to restrict protests, disproportionately targeting those organized by minority groups.

In 2020, extensive internet shutdowns in conflict-affected areas, particularly Rakhine and Chin states, further curtailed freedom of assembly. These shutdowns severely limited people’s ability to access vital information, organize collectively, and participate in public life, including in the lead-up to the 2020 general elections and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the 2021 coup, restrictions on assembly have intensified dramatically. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, the junta imposed bans on gatherings of more than five people and enforced nationwide curfews. Large-scale anti-military protests were met with violent crackdowns, resulting in mass arrests, injuries, and deaths. Security forces have continued to use lethal force, arbitrary detention, and harassment to suppress any form of public demonstration, effectively extinguishing space for peaceful protest.

Additional Resources

This section contains links to external reports and news reports relevant to civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

GLOBAL INDEX RANKINGS

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best - worst possible)
UN Human Development Index	150 (2025)	1 - 193
World Justice Project Rule of Law Index	138 (2025)	1 - 142
Fund for Peace Fragile States Index	11 (2024)	179 - 1
Transparency International	168 (2024)	1 - 180
Freedom House: Freedom in the World	Status: Not Free Political Rights: 0 Civil Liberties: 7 (2025)	Free/Partly Free/Not Free 40 - 0 60 - 0

REPORTS

UN Universal Periodic Review Reports	Myanmar UPR page
UN Human Rights Reports	• Myanmar OHCHR page • Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar (2015) • Report of the detailed findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (2018) • A/78/527: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar (2023) • Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar (2024)
International Labour Organization	Resolution concerning the measures recommended by the Governing Body under article 33 of the ILO Constitution on the subject of Myanmar (2025)
U.S. State Department	Country Reports on Human Rights (2024)
Fund for Peace Fragile States Index Reports	Myanmar (2024)
International Commission of Jurists	• ICJ Intervention on the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar (2007) • Myanmar State Administration Council Organization Registration Law 2022: Legal Briefing (2022)
International Court of Justice	The International Court of Justice finds the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar) admissible (22 July 2022)
Amnesty International	Myanmar (2024)
Special Advisory Council-Myanmar (SAC-M)	• “Briefing Paper: Myanmar and the International Criminal Court” (15 December 2022) • SAC-M Establishing an International Criminal Tribunal for Myanmar (2023)
ICNL Online Library	Myanmar

HISTORICAL NOTES

Although the term “civil society” was introduced in Myanmar only in the mid-1990s, community-based and religious organizations have been active in the country for decades. Traditionally, these groups were formed by young people to support religious and social events.

During the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) era (1962-1988), civic space was tightly controlled. Only government-initiated organizations were permitted. Literary and cultural associations established by the BSPP in ethnic minority areas continued to operate after the 1988 pro-democracy uprisings. Over time, some of these groups transformed into ethnic-based organizations, which continue to teach their own languages and implement social activities.

In the early 1990s, United Nations agencies and international NGOs began playing an active role in

Myanmar. With their support, local CSOs emerged, many of which focused on service delivery in areas such as health care, health education, HIV/AIDS prevention, child protection, and microfinance.

In 2008, Cyclone Nargis fueled the growth of civil society, as volunteers from all over the country formed local organizations to conduct relief work. While some of these groups were temporary and dissolved after the crisis, many continued their work.

Following constitutional reform in 2008, Myanmar held its first general elections in 20 years in 2010, bringing military-turned-civilian President Thein Sein to power in 2011. During Thein Sein's administration, Myanmar embarked on a cautious and uneven transition toward greater openness, although restrictions on freedoms of assembly, association, and expression persisted. A notable development during this period was the enactment of the Association Registration Law (ARL) in July 2014, which repealed the 1988 Association Act. The ARL introduced a more enabling regulatory framework for CSOs and marked a relative opening of civic space.

The fragile progress was reversed following the military coup in February 2021. In response, ousted elected representatives formed the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and the National Unity Government (NUG), claiming to be the country's legitimate legislature and executive government. The military junta, in turn, declared both groups as terrorist organizations. Under the rule of the junta, civic freedoms in Myanmar are tightly restricted.

NEWS

[Elections a Fraudulent Claim for Credibility](#) (November 2025)

Foreign governments should reject the Myanmar junta's plans to hold elections from late December 2025 through January 2026 because they will not be free, fair, or inclusive, Human Rights Watch said. Since the February 2021 military coup, the junta has systematically dismantled the rule of law and the country's nascent democratic systems, and ahead of the polls it has ramped up repression and violence.

[This military junta is rebranding itself to hold elections](#) (August 2025)

As evidence mounts of intensifying atrocities, including the torture of children, being committed in Myanmar, the country's military generals are rebranding their junta regime and planning stage-managed elections in a nation they only control parts of. They've rescinded a four-year state of emergency order, imposed during their 2021 military coup, and formed a caretaker administration to govern the war-torn Southeast Asian country until a new parliament is assembled following a national vote. The election, to be held in stages over December 2025 and January 2026, is resoundingly regarded as a sham and a tool used by the junta to give it a veneer of legitimacy as it seeks to entrench its rule and gain international recognition.

[Myanmar ends state of emergency in some parts before planned elections](#) (July 2025)

Myanmar's military government has declared the end of a state of emergency in parts of the country as it ramps up plans for elections, which opposition groups have pledged to boycott, and monitors warn will be used to consolidate the military's hold on power under leader Min Aung Hlaing. Military government spokesperson Zaw Min Tun made the announcement four and a half years after the military deposed the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi in a coup, sparking a multisided civil war that has killed thousands of people. The elections will take place in both December and January due to security concerns.

[Exiled journalists from Myanmar fear new Thai law](#) (December 2024)

A new draft law being considered by Thailand's Ministry of Interior after a public consultation could damage the fragile existence that many people in exile from Myanmar have. The Association and Foundations Bill was proposed in October. If passed, it would require nonprofits to register with the Minister of Interior and to have a minimum of 30 Thai staff members. Noncompliance comes with fines of up to \$3,000. The draft bill is especially concerning for journalists, who have been working from exile in Thailand since the February 2021 military coup. Many registered their media outlets as nonprofits, and do not have the capacity to comply with the law.

[**Myanmar junta restricts more mobile apps**](#) (July 2024)

Some Google apps along with the popular messaging app Signal now appear to be blocked inside Myanmar, residents told Radio Free Asia. Several residents said they had been unable to access either the encrypted messaging service or Google apps except when using a virtual private network, or VPN. The junta has not released a statement saying they have blocked the apps, but the military government has banned a range of messaging apps, social media apps, and VPNs since coming to power in a February 2021 coup.

[**Myanmar youth look to flee conscription or join armed rebels fighting junta**](#) (February 2024)

A conscription order by Myanmar's weakened junta has seeded dread among the nation's youth, with many making plans to flee or join pro-democracy fighters to avoid being drafted into the loathed military.... The junta says it wants 60,000 new recruits to sign up each year – starting with 5,000 every month from April. Anyone who dodges the draft faces up to five years in jail.

[**Myanmar's "counter-terrorism" by-laws must be denounced for what they are - illegal**](#) (April 2023)

The Myanmar military issued a slew of new by-laws pursuant to the country's 2014 Counter Terrorism Act – all of which give the junta vast and unchecked powers to control, monitor, and target any resistance to their ongoing brutality on the ground. These rules are anything but legal, however, offering only a veneer of authority to the military's authoritarian attacks against the people of Myanmar. The international community must denounce this latest in a long line of measures designed to censor, curtail, and control people's online activities.

[**Amendment grants Myanmar junta sweeping new powers under Anti-Terrorism Law**](#) (April 2023)

Myanmar's junta has expanded its ability to target those who seek its removal from power by sharpening the teeth of law that it's already used to jail hundreds of people since seizing power in a coup d'état two years ago. The addendum to the Anti-Terrorism Law issued on March 1 allows authorities to eavesdrop on suspects, confiscate their assets and take other steps to crush the opposition.

[**Myanmar's military government enacts new political party law**](#) (January 2023)

Myanmar's military-controlled government has enacted a new law on registration of political parties that will make it difficult for opposition groups to mount a serious challenge to army-backed candidates in a general election set to take place later this year. The new electoral law, published in the state-run Myanmar Alinn newspaper, sets minimum funding and membership levels for parties participating in the polls. It also bans participation by parties or candidates deemed unlawful or linked to organizations declared by the military government to be terrorist groups.

[**Military regime's new "law" aims to further decimate the function of civil society**](#) (November 2022)

Myanmar's de facto military government has promulgated an Organization Registration Law (ORL) which stands to further shackle the functioning of civil society in the country. The Law is plainly non-compliant with international human rights law and standards, imposing serious obstacles to the exercise of freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, expression and information, and the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs.

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